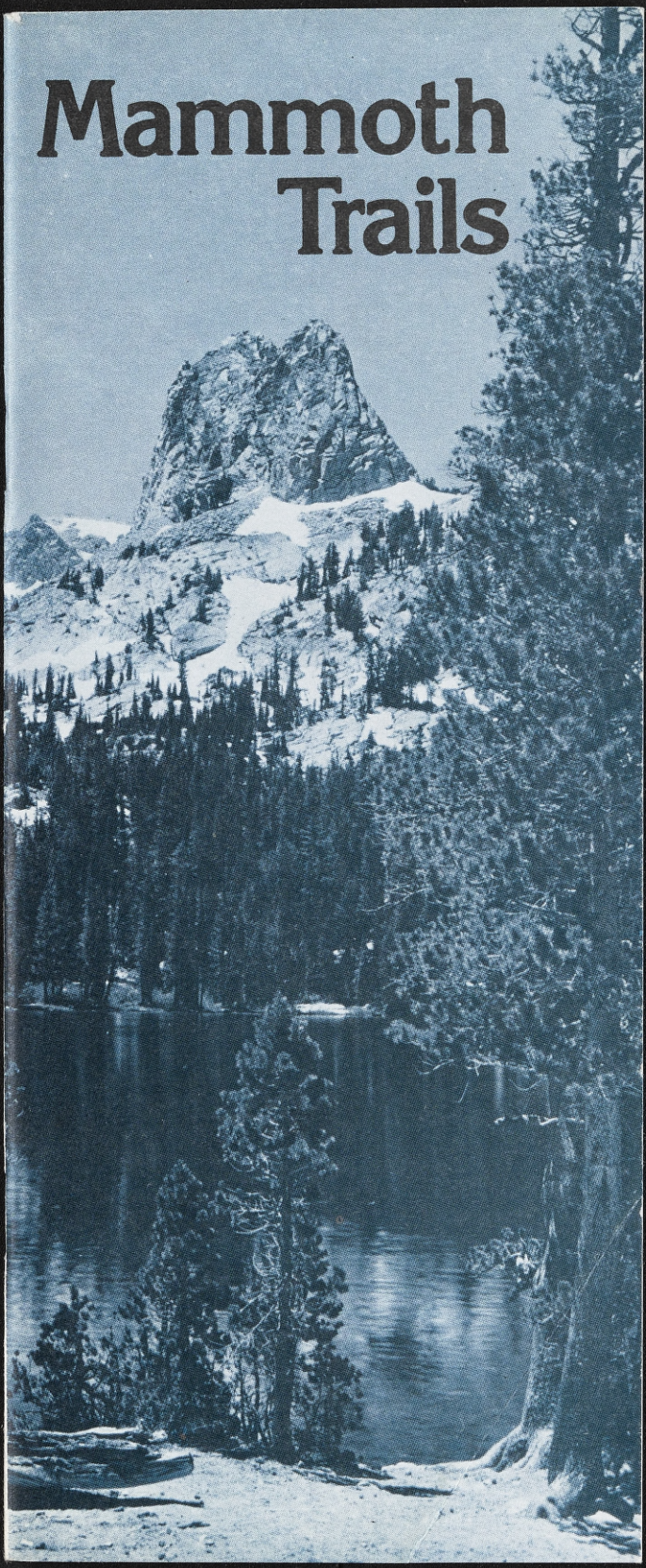
Mammoth Trails



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5 Mammoth Rock Map
6 Map—Sherwin, Valentine Lakes
7 Sherwin Valentine Lakes
8 Mammoth Knolls Text
9 Mammoth Knolls Map
10 Map—Mammoth Lakes Basin
11 No Text
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WELCOME, HIKERS

The Mammoth Ranger District on the Inyo National Forest offers unlimited opportunities for hiking. Stretch your muscles and your endurance as you learn more about the great outdoors and the natural rhythms that sustain our earth.

Start with short hikes and build up to the longer and harder trips. In the process, you will discover the joys and challenges that entice the confirmed outdoors enthusiast.

As you test your legs and lungs, remember you are also testing your ability to be self-reliant. The further you venture away from the road, the more distance you put between yourself and the security of manmade comforts. You are entering a world where the elements and natural cycles hold sway. It may be a balmy, sunny day the entire time you are tramping the trails. Or, the weather may change dramatically within hours to rain, sleet, or snow. Mountain weather can be most unpredictable.

Nature is unforgiving when it comes to dealing with human error. There is no pleading or changing the rules. If it snows unexpectedly, you must have enough self-reliance to cope with the situation. You need to have alternative plans and props to rely upon when the going gets rough.

For these reasons, we urge you to approach the outdoor environment prepared to meet the challenges it presents. Carry a day pack with a warm jacket, a wool hat, and rain gear. Make certain every member of the party is equipped to stay dry in a downpour.

A party is only as strong as its weakest member. If one of your friends or family is suffering, you will also. Carry a small first aid kit to deal with blisters and other basic injuries. Equip the youngsters in your hiking group with a whistle and instructions to "stay put" if they become lost or confused or if you become lost from them! Assure them that you will be looking for them if they disappear from your sight.

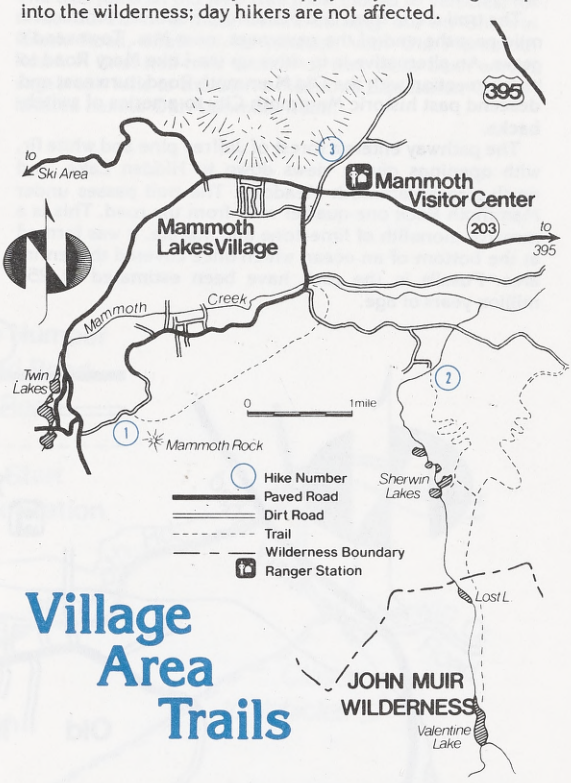
Keep your group together no matter what happens. Hikers usually become lost from their buddies because of confusion or stubbornness.

Carry extra food and a fire starter with you so you can survive a night in the cold if you become lost or injured. A few extra pounds could become a matter of survival. Your basic problem will be to remain warm and calm. If you feel confident of your ability to conquer the unexpected, your chances of making it are much greater.

There are many more tips and skills needed for overnight hiking and route finding. Book stores carry some excellent sources of such information. Tread lightly and enjoy your hike.

DO I NEED A WILDERNESS PERMIT?

The majority of hikes in this book take place outside designated wilderness areas. This emphasis has resulted from a desire to reduce excessive congestion on those trails with a large number of backpackers. Most wilderness trails fit into this category. A few wilderness hikes are included, usually in areas which are less heavily used. When a wilderness permit is required, it is mentioned in the "remarks" section of the hike description. In a few cases, these hikes use trails on which there is a daily limit during the busy season. Such quotas apply only to overnight trips into the wilderness; day hikers are not affected.



Village Area Trails

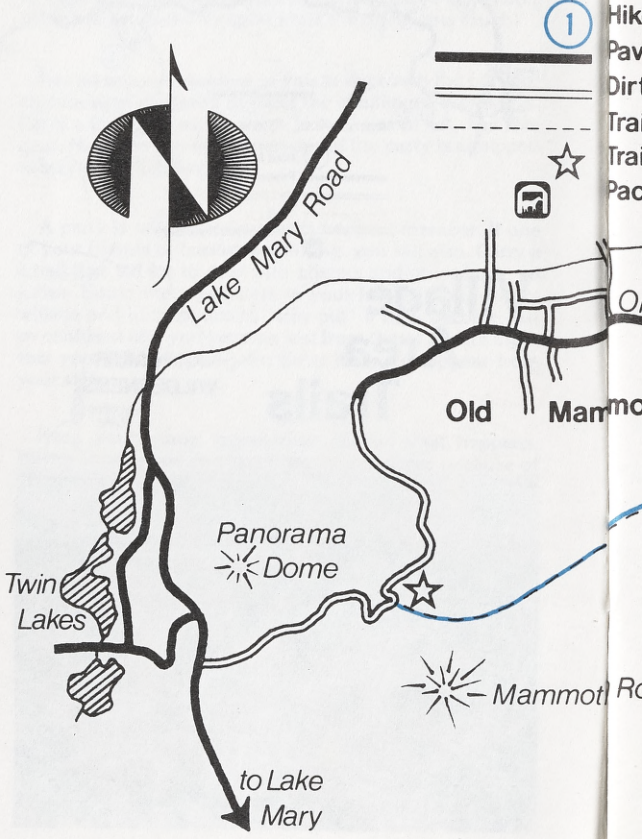
1 MAMMOTH ROCK TRAIL

This easy, scenic ramble, close to town, is a recent addition to local hiking opportunities. The trail is built wide and gradual for stock travel. For a downhill walk all the way, travel the route in the direction described.

LENGTH: 2½ mi. (Sherwin Creek Rd.); 3 mi. (Sierra Meadows stables)
ELEVATION: 8,480' to 7,840' (640' descent)
BEST SEASON: June through October
REMARKS: Set up a car shuttle to the trailhead for an easy, one-way hike. There is no water along the trail.

The trail starts from Old Mammoth Road, six-tenths of a mile past the end of the pavement, near Mrs. Townsend's grave. An alternative is to drive up the Lake Mary Road to its intersection with the Old Mammoth Road, turn east and descend past historic Mammoth City to a series of switchbacks.

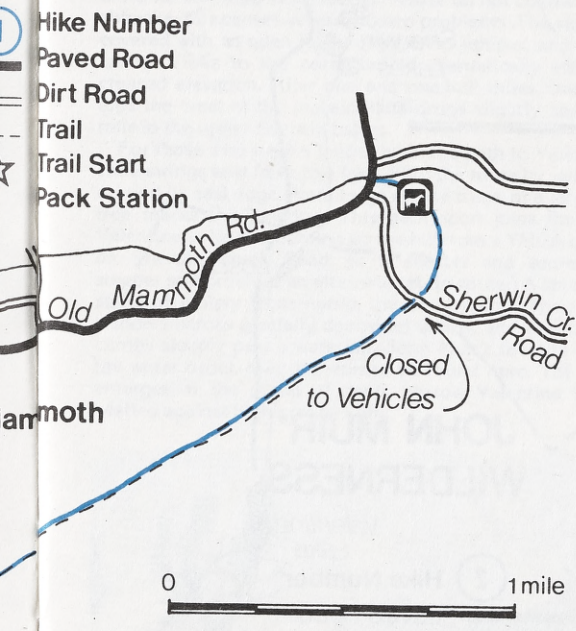
The pathway enters a forest of Jeffrey pine and white fir, with openings giving views down to Hidden Lake, and north across Mammoth Meadows. The trail passes under Mammoth Rock one-quarter mile from the road. This is a massive monolith of limestone and marble. It was formed at the bottom of an ocean which once covered this entire area. Fossils in the rock have been estimated at 250 million years of age.

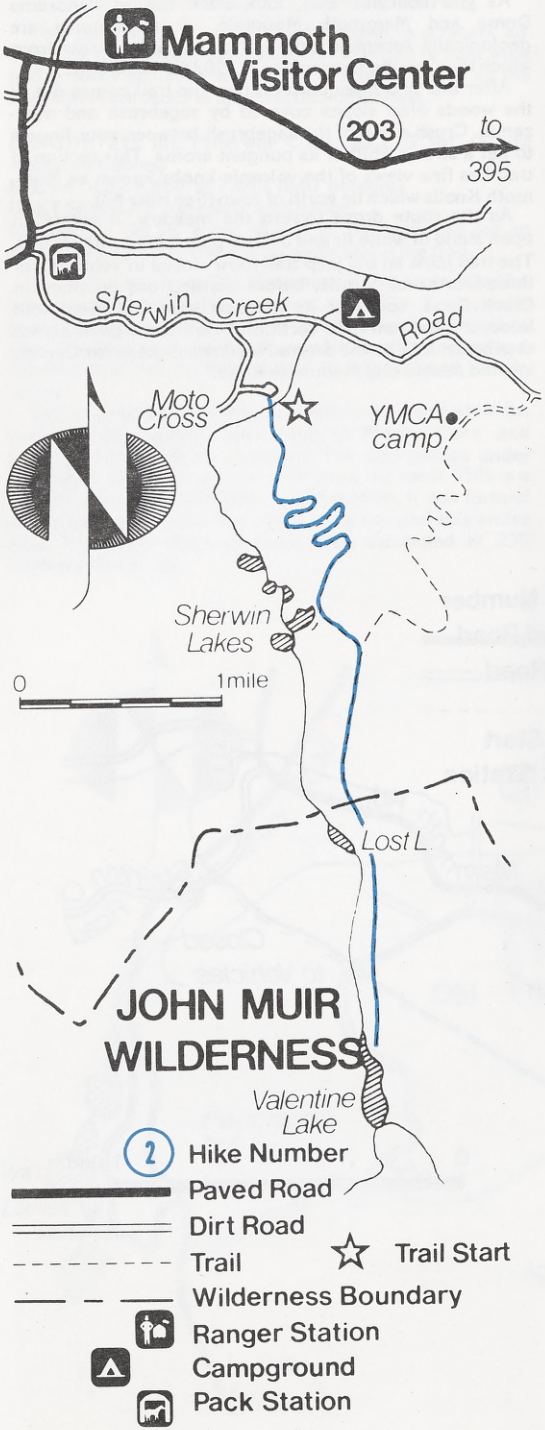


As you continue east, look back toward Panorama Dome and Mammoth Mountain. These features are geologically recent in origin. The volcanic events from which they resulted began about 150,000 years ago.

After one and one-quarter miles, the trail comes out of the woods onto slopes covered by sagebrush and manzanita. Crush a leaf of the sagebrush between your fingers to get a strong whiff of its pungent aroma. This section of trail has fine views of the volcanic knobs known as Mammoth Knolls which lie north of town (See Hike #3).

As the route drops toward the meadow, it enters an open stand of white fir and Jeffrey pine mixed with shrubs. The trail joins an old jeep trail (now closed to vehicles) for three-fourths of a mile, before coming out on Sherwin Creek Road, south of its junction with Old Mammoth Road. A final half-mile section of trail leads back across sagebrush hills to the Sierra Meadows Equestrian Center, located next to Old Mammoth Road.




Mammoth
Visitor Center
203
to
395
Sherwin Creek Road
Moto
Cross
YMCA
camp
Sherwin
Lakes
0
1 mile
Lost L.
JOHN MUIR
WILDERNESS
Valentine
Lake
2 Hike Number
Paved Road
Dirt Road
Trail
Trail Start
Wilderness Boundary
Ranger Station
Campground
Pack Station

2 SHERWIN AND VALENTINE LAKES

A favorite of early and late season hikers, the trail to Sherwin Lakes is fairly steep, but short enough to make it a moderate hike. More energetic hikers may wish to continue on to Valentine Lake. The trail begins in the forest, and climbs and crosses open slopes with excellent views to the north and east.

LENGTH: 2 mi. (Sherwin Lakes); 5 mi. (Valentine)
ELEVATION: 7,800' to 8,620' (820' climb to Sherwin); to 9,650' (1850' climb to Valentine).
BEST SEASON: Spring and Fall
REMARKS: Sherwin Lakes are good for fishing; fall colors peak in mid-October; the trail on the topo map has been abandoned and replaced by this trail. Wilderness permit required for Valentine, but not for Sherwin.

The trailhead is located off the unpaved Sherwin Creek Road, two and one-half miles south of Mammoth. The trail begins west of the restrooms. It crosses Sherwin Creek on a footlog, bears left, and rambles through the woods for one-half mile before beginning to climb. Sherwin Lakes lie in a basin formed when a glacier retreated, leaving a giant pile of debris (known as a terminal moraine) at the mouth of the canyon. The route ascends the steep front of the moraine with long switchbacks. Please do not cut the switchbacks; this causes severe erosion problems. The slope is covered with an open forest of pine, fir, juniper, and manzanita. Views to the north unfold dramatically with increased elevation. After one and one-half miles, the trail tops the crest of the moraine and drops slightly one-half mile to the upper Sherwin Lakes.

For those who want a longer hike, the path to Valentine Lake swings east from this lake. Find the route by walking around its east edge. A trail sign on the trunk of a large fir tree marks the junction. This path soon joins the Old Valentine Lake trail coming up the hill from a YMCA camp on Sherwin Creek Road. (It is shorter and somewhat steeper and provides an alternate return route.) A splendid stand of juniper trees marks the intersection. The route wanders across glacially deposited debris, and eventually climbs steeply past a waterfall. John Muir's favorite bird, the water ouzel, may sometimes be found here. The trail emerges at the outlet of deep, narrow Valentine Lake nestled against high granite cliffs.

3 MAMMOTH KNOLLS

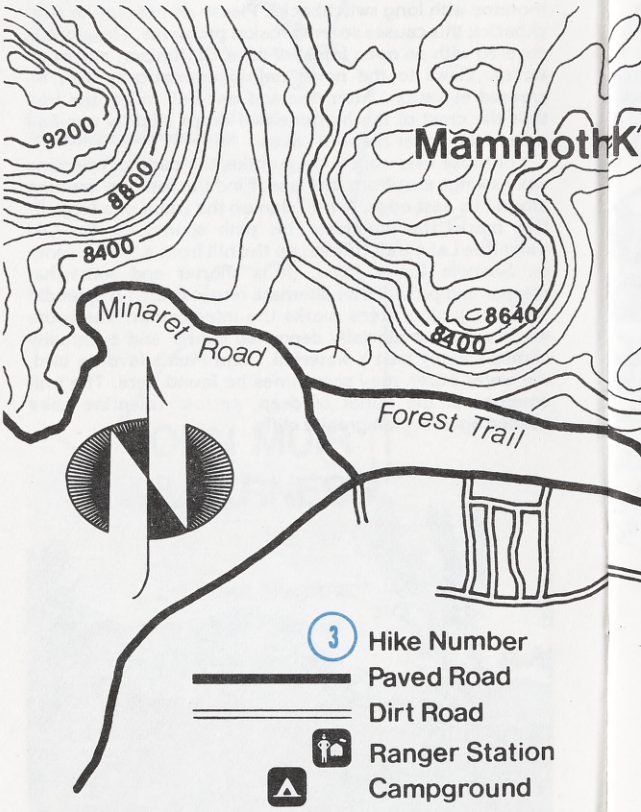
The volcanic knobs north of Mammoth are close to town, but worlds apart in atmosphere. Hiking the knolls requires a spirit of adventure, and a willingness to travel without marked trails and known distances. Chances are you will be alone, as most people pass up this opportunity to investigate the unexpected.

ELEVATION: 7,800 to 8,640'

BEST SEASON: June through October

The easiest way to begin, is to drive or walk out Sawmill Cutoff Road, past Shady Rest Campground and the turnoff to Mammoth Community Park. Leave your car parked off the road, and head west up the hill to your left, following one of the many old jeep or deer trails that crisscross the area. Climb until you reach the top, and start to explore.

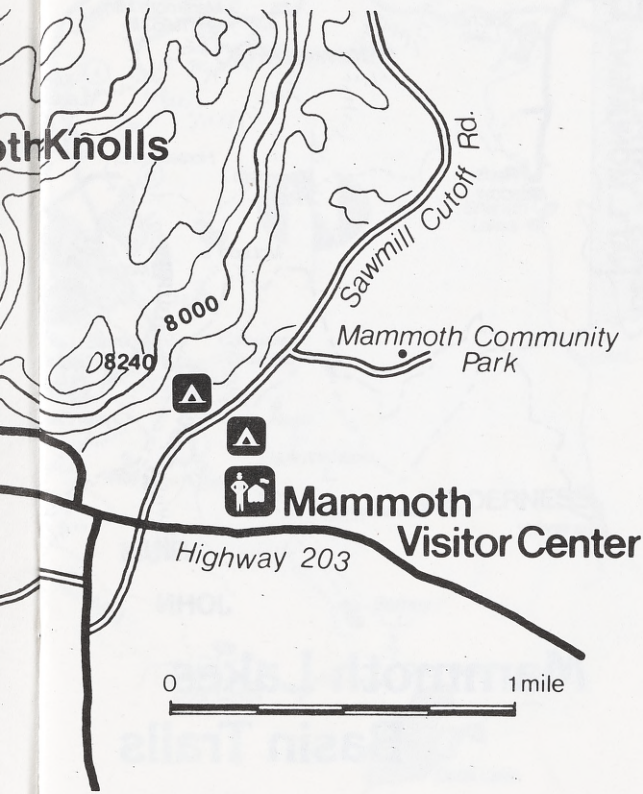
The open Jeffrey Pine forest with sagebrush underneath, provides warm, sweet aromas and easy wandering. Walk north along the ridge until you emerge in the

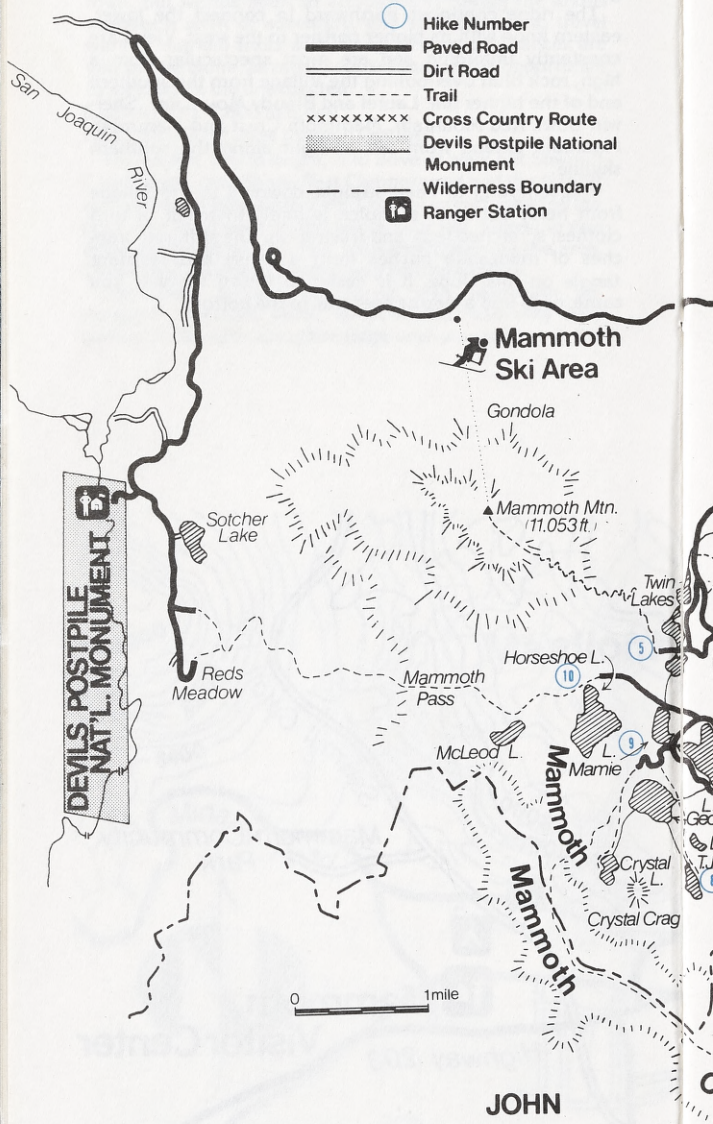


sunlight on the site of an old burn. Isolated dead, burned and windsculpted trees stand in contrast to a dominant growth of low sagebrush scrub and manzanita.

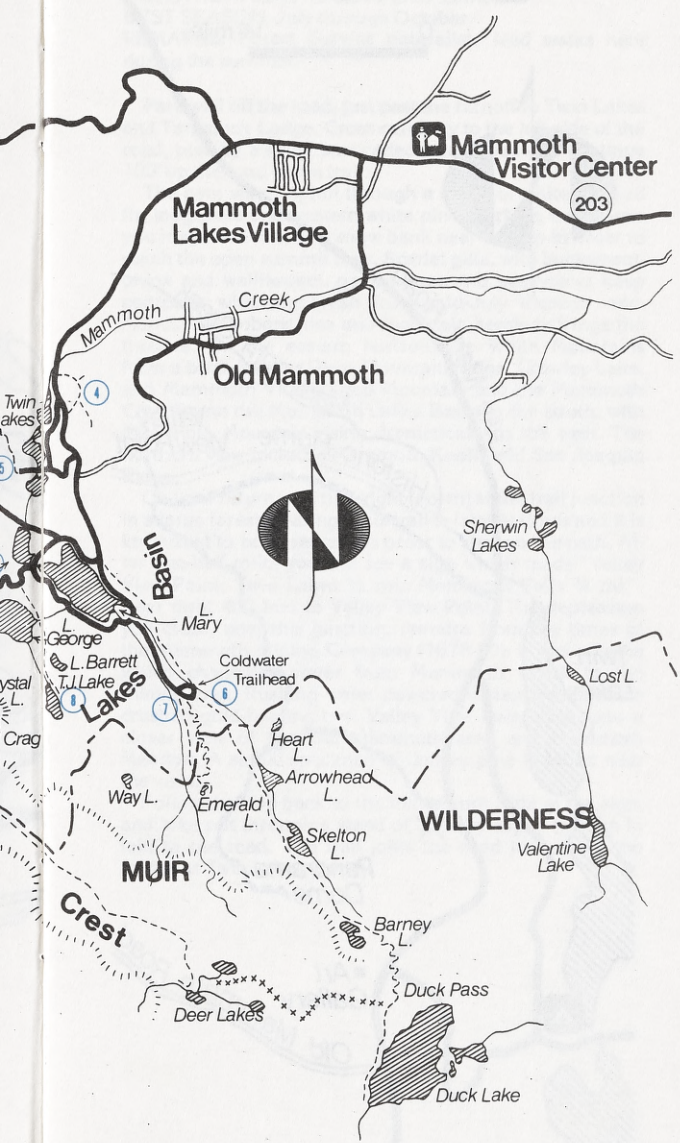
The ridge continues northward to connect the lower, eastern knoll with its higher partner to the west. Views are constantly unfolding and are most spectacular from a high, rock bluff overlooking the Village from the southern end of the higher hill. Laurel and Bloody Mountains, Sherwin Bowl, Red Mountain, Mammoth Crest and Mammoth Mountain extend from left to right along the southern skyline.

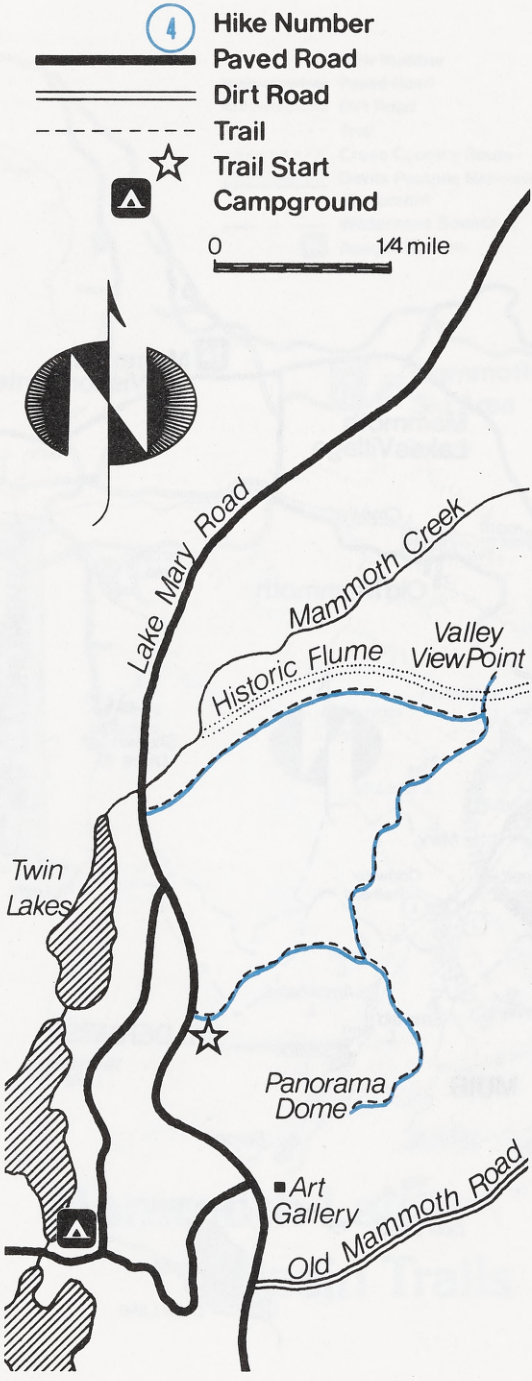
It is tempting to head straight downhill to the Village from here, but such a choice is likely to result in torn clothes, scratched legs, and frustration. The stiff, red branches of manzanita bushes form a dense and resistant tangle on this slope. It is easier to return the way you came, or to find a jeep or deer trail to the bottom.





Mammoth Lakes Basin Trails


Mammoth Visitor Center
203
Mammoth Lakes Village
Mammoth Creek
Old Mammoth
Twin Lakes
4
5
Basin
Sherwin Lakes
L. Mary
L. George
L. Barrett
T.J. Lake
Lakes
8
7
6
Coldwater Trailhead
Lost L.
Crag
Heart L.
Arrowhead L.
Way L.
Emerald L.
Skelton L.
WILDERNESS
Valentine Lake
MUIR
Crest
Barney L.
Duck Pass
Deer Lakes
Duck Lake


4
Hike Number
Paved Road
Dirt Road
Trail
Trail Start
Campground
0
1/4 mile
Lake Mary Road
Mammoth Creek
Historic Flume
Valley
View Point
Twin
Lakes
Panorama
Dome
Art
Gallery
Old Mammoth Road

4 PANORAMA DOME

A short climb through a shady forest brings the hiker to an open hilltop providing superb views of the surrounding area. It is an excellent place for studying local geology. Abundant wildflowers bloom in midsummer. A return loop touches on sites of historical interest. This transition-zone boasts seven species of coniferous trees.

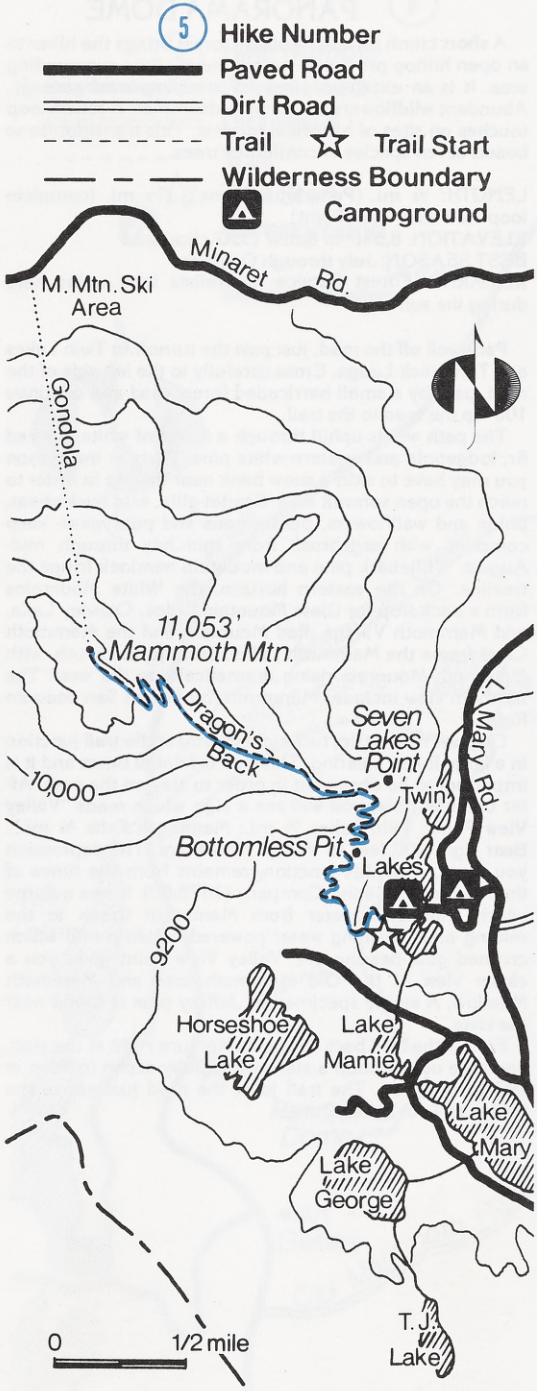
LENGTH: ½ mi. (Panorama Dome); 1½ mi. (complete loop via Valley View Point)
ELEVATION: 8,540' to 8,890' (350' climb)
BEST SEASON: July through October
REMARKS: Forest Service naturalists lead walks here during the summer.

Park well off the road, just past the turnoff to Twin Lakes and Tamarack Lodge. Cross carefully to the left side of the road, pass by a small barricaded forest road and continue 100' up the road to the trail.

The path winds uphill through a forest of white and red fir, lodgepole and western white pine. Early in the season you may have to skirt a snow bank near the top in order to reach the open summit area. Scarlet gilia, wild buckwheat, phlox and wallflowers, penstemons and pussypaws keep company with sagebrush from mid-July through mid-August. Whitebark pine and mountain hemlock fringe the treeline. On the eastern horizon, the White Mountains form a backdrop for Glass Mountain Ridge, Crowley Lake, and Mammoth Village. Red Mountain and the Mammoth Crest frame the Mammoth Lakes Basin to the south, with Mammoth Mountain rising dramatically to the west. The northern view includes Mammoth Knolls and San Joaquin Ridge.

On your return trip, turn right (north) at the trail junction in a large forest clearing. This trail is faint at times and it is important to be observant in order to stay on the path. After one-half mile, you will see a sign which reads "Valley View Point; Twin Lakes ½ mi.; Mammoth Falls ¾ mi.". Bear right 400 feet to Valley View Point. The depression you cross, near this junction, remains from the times of the Mammoth Mining Company (1878-80). It was a flume which channeled water from Mammoth Creek to the mining area. Rushing water powered a stamp mill which crushed gold-bearing ore. Valley View Point gives you a closer view of the Old Mammoth area and Mammoth Meadow. A single specimen of Jeffrey pine is found near the vista.

Follow the trail back to the flume, turn right at the sign, and hike out through a stand of scrubby aspen (golden in fall) to the road. The trail joins the road just above the bridge at Twin Lakes Outlet.


5 Hike Number
Paved Road
Dirt Road
Trail
Trail Start
Wilderness Boundary
Campground
Minaret Rd.
M. Mtn. Ski Area
Gondola
11,053'
Mammoth Mtn.
Dragon's Back
10,000
Seven Lakes Point
Twin Lakes
Mary Rd.
Bottomless Pit
9200
Horseshoe Lake
Lake Mamie
Lake Mary
Lake George
T. J. Lake
0
1/2 mile

5 BOTTOMLESS PIT—SEVEN LAKES POINT—MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN SUMMIT

If strenuous exercise and spectacular views appeal to you then consider the steep ascent of the eastern flank of Mammoth Mountain. There are several destination points along the way and the hardiest hiker may choose to climb all the way to the top of the mountain.

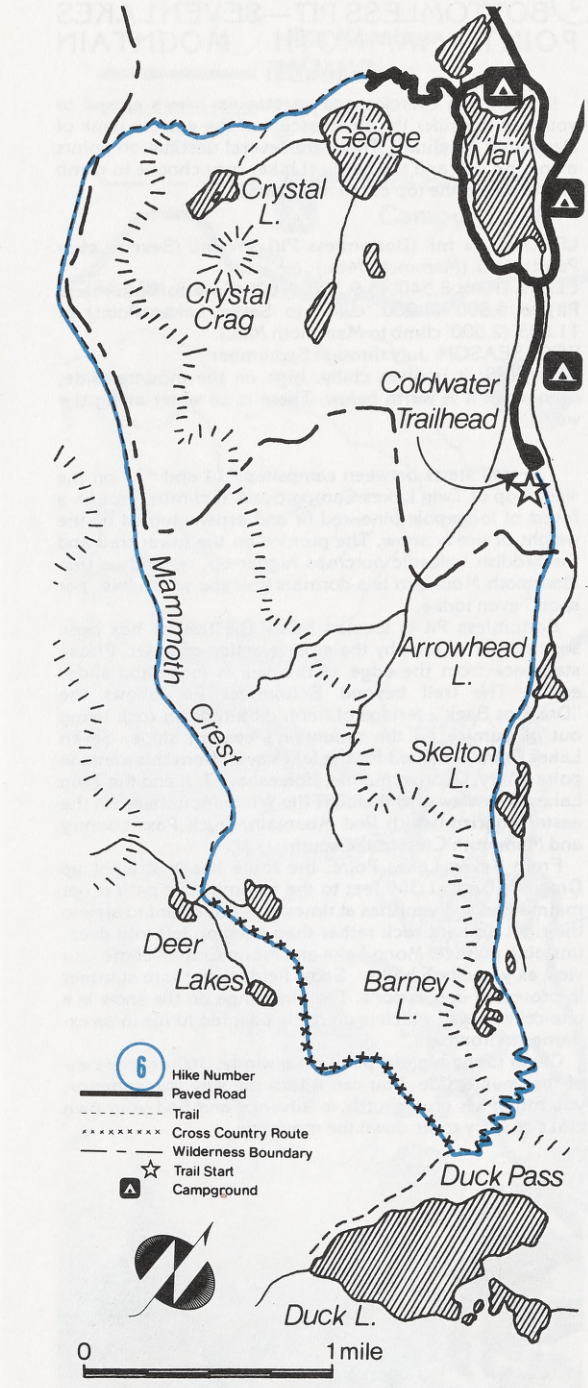
LENGTH: ¾ mi. (Bottomless Pit) 1¼ mi. (Seven Lakes Point); 4 mi. (Mammoth Mtn.)
ELEVATION: 8,540' to 9,300' (760' climb to Bottomless Pit) to 9,800' (1,260' climb to Seven Lakes Point) to 11,053' (2,500' climb to Mammoth Mtn.)
BEST SEASON: July through September
REMARKS: It is often chilly, high on the mountainside, even when it is warm below. There is no water along the way.

The trail starts between campsites #14 and #23 on the west loop of Twin Lakes Campground. It climbs through a forest of lodgepole pine, red fir and aspen stunted by the weight of heavy snow. The pumice on the lower trail and the reddish volcanic outcrops higher up, remind us that Mammoth Mountain is a dormant volcano which has "hot spots" even today.

Bottomless Pit is located below the trail. It has been scoured out of rock by the erosive action of water. Please stay back from the edge as this soil is loose and slides easily. The trail beyond Bottomless Pit follows the "Dragons Back", a ridge of hard, dark-reddish rock rising out of pumice on the mountain's eastern slope. Seven Lakes Point is named for the lakes seen from this vantage point: Mary, George, Mamie, Horseshoe, T.J. and the Twin Lakes. The view also includes the White Mountains on the eastern horizon, with Red Mountain, Duck Pass country and Mammoth Crest to the south.

From Seven Lakes Point, the route heads straight up Dragon's Back, 1,300 feet to the summit. The path is not maintained and vanishes at times. It is important to stay to the right on hard rock rather than heading left into deep, unstable pumice. Mono Lake and Mono Craters come into view as you climb higher. Snow fields linger into summer in protected depressions. The pink tinge on the snow is a one-celled algae which is uniquely adapted to life in an extreme environment.

Climb to the highest point for a windy, 360 degree view of the countryside. You can return the way you came or, you might set up a shuttle in advance and find your own cross-country route down the mountain.


George
L. Mary
Crystal L.
Crystal Crag
Coldwater Trailhead
Mammoth Crest
Arrowhead L.
Skelton L.
Deer Lakes
Barney L.
Duck Pass
Duck L.
6
Hike Number
Paved Road
Trail
Cross Country Route
Wilderness Boundary
Trail Start
Campground
0
1 mile

6 A TRAVERSE OVER THE MAMMOTH CREST

An invigorating, 12-mile loop, for strong day hikers, goes up the east side of the Mammoth Crest, crosses it, drops down, then climbs back up and over the crest to pack a variety of alpine experiences into a one day trip.

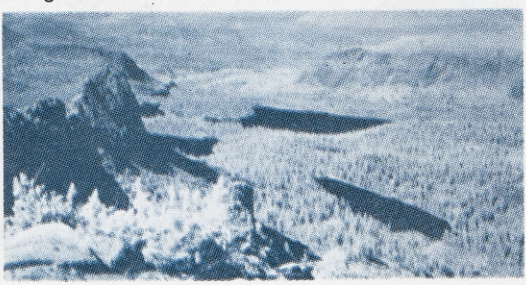
LENGTH: 12 miles
ELEVATION: 9,000' to 11,200' (2,200' climb); 10,400' to 11,200' (800' climb)
BEST SEASON: July through September
REMARKS: Route-finding skills, map and compass essential. Willingness and ability to negotiate cross-country route necessary; technical rock climbing skills not needed. Wilderness permit required; day hikes not included in quota. Car shuttle or prearranged pick up suggested.

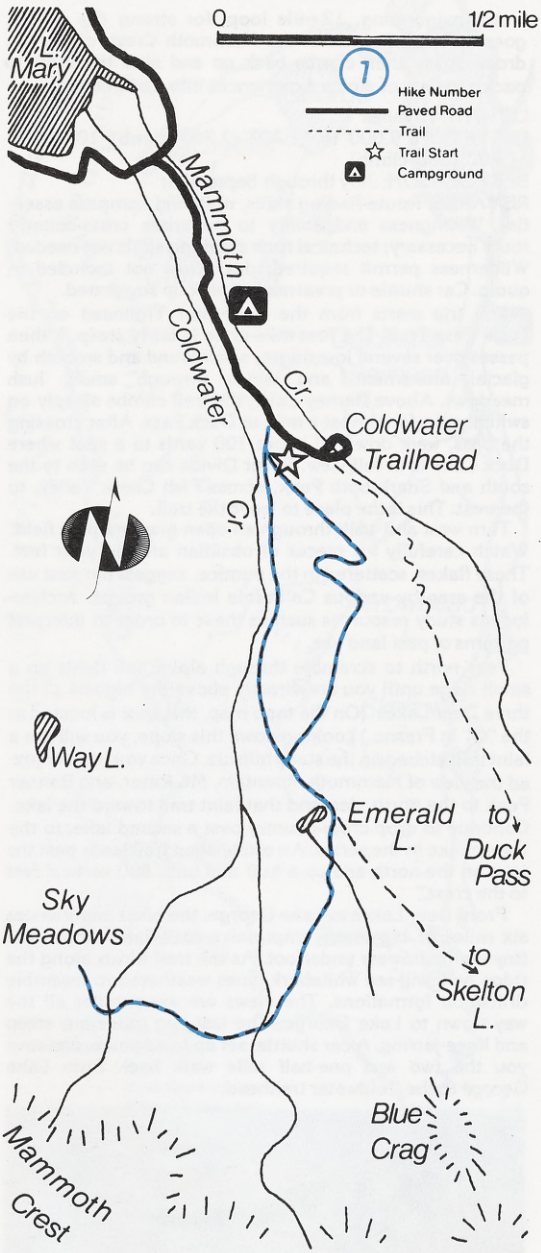
The trip starts from the Coldwater Trailhead on the Duck Pass Trail. The first mile or so is fairly steep. It then passes over several low ridges, worn round and smooth by glacial movement, and winds through small, lush meadows. Above Barney Lake, the trail climbs steeply on switchbacks for almost a mile to Duck Pass. After crossing the pass, walk downhill about 100 yards to a spot where Duck Lake is in full view. Silver Divide can be seen to the south and Sharktooth Peak, across Fish Creek Valley, to the west. This is the place to leave the trail.

Turn west and walk through an open grassy alpine field. Watch carefully for pieces of obsidian around your feet. These flakes, scattered in the pumice, suggest the past use of the area by various California Indian groups. Archeologists study resources such as these in order to interpret patterns of past land use.

Veer north to scramble through alpine fell fields up a small ridge until you are directly above the highest of the three Deer Lakes. (On the topo map, this spot is located at the "O" in Fresno.) Looking down this slope, you will see a faint trail etched on the steep hillside. Once you have enjoyed the view of Mammoth Mountain, Mt. Ritter, and Banner Peak to the north, descend that faint trail toward the lake. Continue to drop cross-country past a second lake, to the lowest lake in the series. An established trail leads past the lake on the north and up a huff and puff, 800 vertical feet to the crest.

From Deer Lakes to Lake George, the hiker experiences six miles of big views, impressive rock formations, and tiny alpine flowers underfoot. As the trail winds along the ridge, you will see whitebark pines weathered to resemble driftwood formations. The views are spectacular all the way down to Lake George. The last two miles are steep and knee-jarring. A car shuttle, set up in advance, can save you the two and one-half mile walk back from Lake George to the Coldwater trailhead.




0
1/2 mile
1
Hike Number
Paved Road
Trail
Trail Start
Campground
L. Mary
Mammoth
Coldwater
Cr.
Coldwater Trailhead
Cr.
Way L.
Emerald L.
to Duck Pass
Sky Meadows
to Skelton L.
Blue Crag
Mammoth Crest

7 EMERALD LAKE AND SKY MEADOWS

Sky Meadows is a high Sierra haven nestled against massive, rocky spires. Try it some balmy summer day when you feel curious or mellow. By all means, take a flower book.

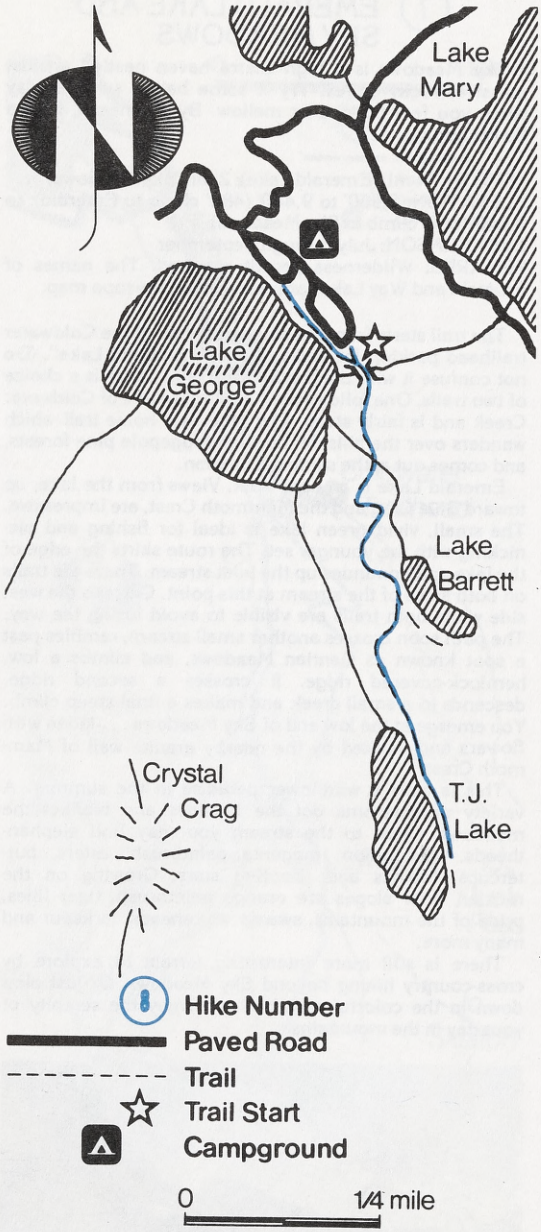
LENGTH: ¾ mi. (Emerald Lake); 2 mi. (Sky Meadows)
ELEVATION: 8,960' to 9,440' (480' climb to Emerald); to 9,840' (880' climb to Sky Meadows)
BEST SEASON: July through September
REMARKS: Wilderness permit required. The names of Emerald and Way Lakes are reversed on the topo map.

The trail starts from the southwest side of the Coldwater trailhead parking lot and is signed "Emerald Lake". (Do not confuse it with the Duck Pass Trail.) There is a choice of two trails. One follows the tumbling waters of Coldwater Creek and is fairly steep. The other is a horse trail which wanders over the hillside, through lodgepole pine forests, and comes out at the same destination.

Emerald Lake is an easy walk. Views from the lake, up toward Blue Crag and the Mammoth Crest, are impressive. The small, vivid green lake is ideal for fishing and picnicking with the younger set. The route skirts the edge of the lake and continues up the inlet stream. There are trails on both sides of the stream at this point. Cross to the west side while both trails are visible to avoid losing the way. The path soon crosses another small stream, rambles past a spot known as Gentian Meadows, and climbs a low, hemlock-covered ridge. It crosses a second ridge, descends to a small creek and makes a final steep climb. You emerge at the low end of Sky Meadows . . . laden with flowers and flanked by the nearby granite wall of Mammoth Crest.

This is truly a wildflower paradise in the summer. A variety of blossoms dot the hillsides and blanket the meadows. Close to the stream you may find elephantheads, wild onion, magenta paintbrush, asters, buttercups, lupines and shooting stars. Growing on the rockier, drier slopes are orange paintbrush, tiger lilies, pride of the mountains, swamp whiteheads, larkspur and many more.

There is still more interesting terrain to explore by cross-country hiking beyond Sky Meadows. Or just plop down in the colorful meadow and enjoy the serenity of your day in the mountains.


Lake
Mary
Lake
George
Lake
Barrett
Crystal
Crag
T.J.
Lake
Hike Number
Paved Road
Trail
Trail Start
Campground
0
1/4 mile

8 BARRET AND T.J. LAKES

Mammoth visitors wanting to quickly sample the beauties of the high lakes will find the short hike to Barrett and T.J. Lakes offers a maximum exposure to mountain scenery with minimum expenditure of effort.

LENGTH: ¼ mile to Lake Barrett; ½ mile to T.J. Lake
ELEVATION: 9,010' to 9,210' (200' climb to Barrett) to 9,260' (250' climb to T.J.)
BEST SEASON: Mid-June through October.
REMARKS: Take your camera and fishing pole.

The trail begins from the east shore of Lake George. Follow the road into the campground and park in indicated areas. Follow the signed path to a bridge which crosses the outlet of Lake George. The path then follows the lake shore for about 100 yards.

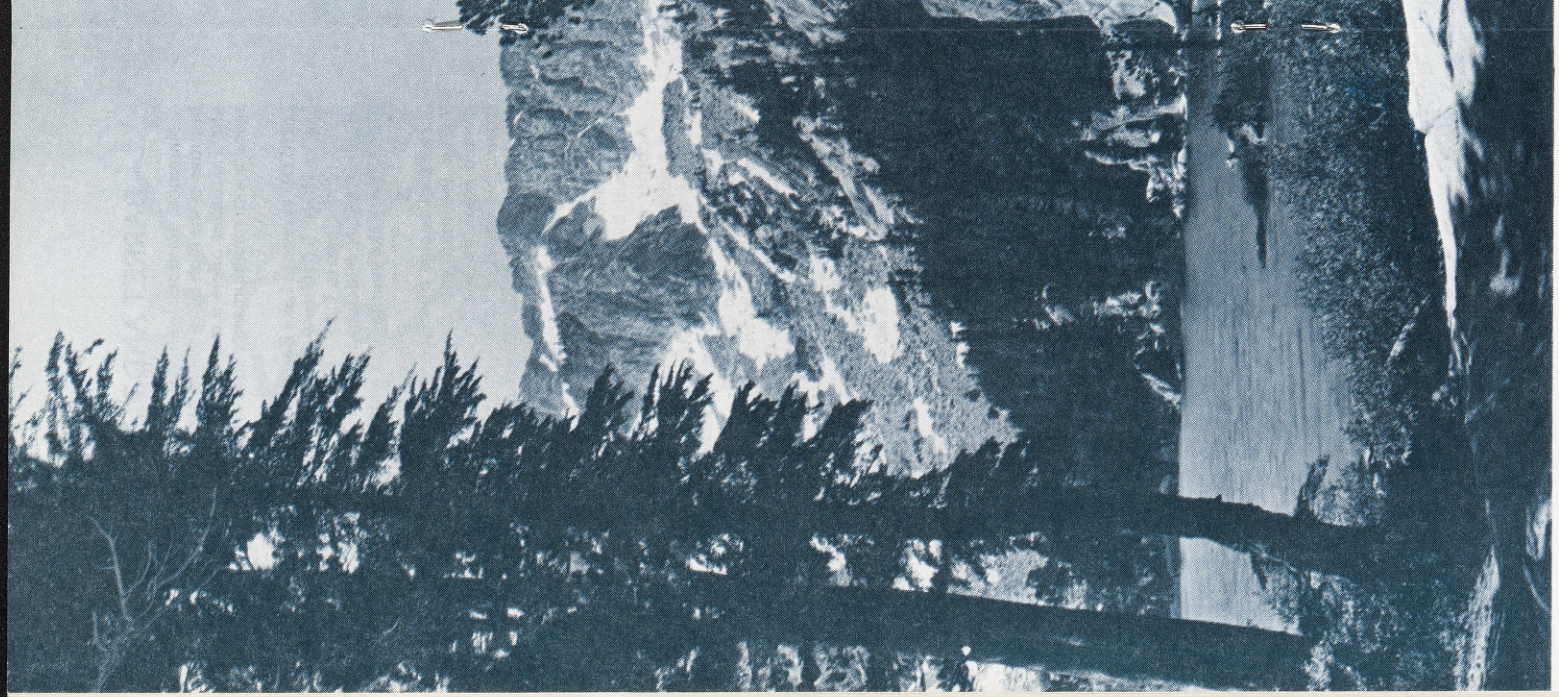
The route consists of climbing a steep hillside of layered rock and, in season, will pass a lush growth of flowers next to a small stream. Barrett Lake is a relatively small and shallow lake, ringed by lodgepole pine and backdropped to the south by Red Mountain.

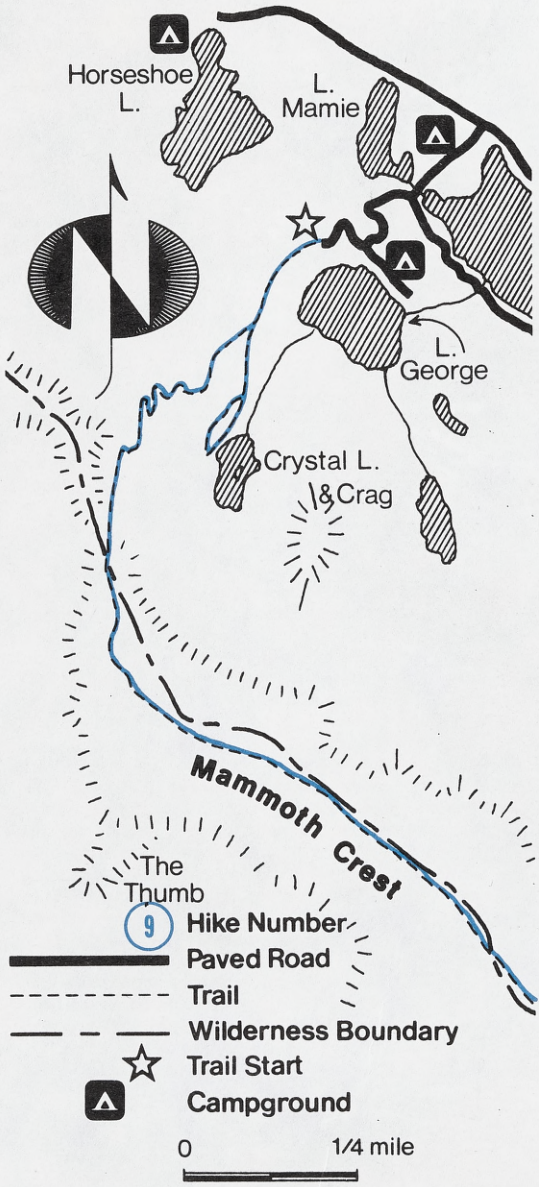
Another one-fourth mile walk through the forest and over a ridge brings the hiker to T.J. Lake - higher, deeper and more dramatic. To the south, Crystal Crag rises tall and impressive. Lodgepole pine, western pine and mountain hemlock surround the lake.

Given the short walk, the rugged beauty is unexpected. Crystal Crag soars above the blue lake; Mammoth Crest dominates the skyline to the south; and the northwest is bounded by sheer granite walls.

Spend some time along the shores of T.J. Lake to get the feel of a mountain lake. Sheer cliffs beckon the technical climber. Rock scrambles, above towering Crystal Crag, tempt the adventurous. Occasionally, fish rise from the depths of the waters.

At the upper end of the lake, a small, moist meadow is blanketed with wildflowers during the short growing season. Ask inquisitive youngsters if they can find a spring coming out of the duff-covered slope near the end of the lake. Or watch for big slabs of granite that could serve as a shelter if the weather were to turn foul.




Horseshoe L.
L. Mamie
L. George
Crystal L. & Crag
Mammoth Crest
The Thumb
9 Hike Number
Paved Road
Trail
Wilderness Boundary
Trail Start
Campground
0
1/4 mile

9 CRYSTAL LAKE AND MAMMOTH CREST

It's a steep trek and most people think it must be longer than the sign says. But Crystal Lake, set dramatically at the base of Crystal Crag, has a remote and rugged atmosphere typically associated with special places much further into the backcountry. Mammoth Crest provides views in all directions.

LENGTH: 1 ¼ mi. (Crystal Lake); 3 mi. (Mammoth Crest)
ELEVATION: 9,000' to 9,640' (640' climb to Crystal Lake) to 10,400' (1,400' climb to Mammoth Crest)
BEST SEASON: July through mid-October
REMARKS: The hike to Mammoth Crest requires a wilderness permit; the hike to Crystal Lake does not. There is no water past Crystal Lake.

The trail starts at the parking lot just to the right of the Lake George Road, before the spur road to Woods Lodge. It passes behind and above a summer home tract before the real climb begins. The trail may be hard to follow in places because many hikers have cut the switchbacks causing severe erosion. As you climb, views of the Mammoth Lakes basin below and Red Mountain across the way become more spectacular. There are many photo spots along the way. Most of the trees here are lodgepole pine and mountain hemlock, including some giant specimens of each.

The trail to Crystal Lake forks left, while the Mammoth Crest Trail continues straight ahead. A maze of meandering trails heads south through the woods to the lake. About 500 yards from the junction there is a distinct fork. The right fork climbs to a hillside with a view of Crystal Lake, then drops sharply to the shoreline. The left fork meets the outlet stream and follows it to the lake. Fishing is good and the scenery is outstanding. And just think of the exercise you are getting!

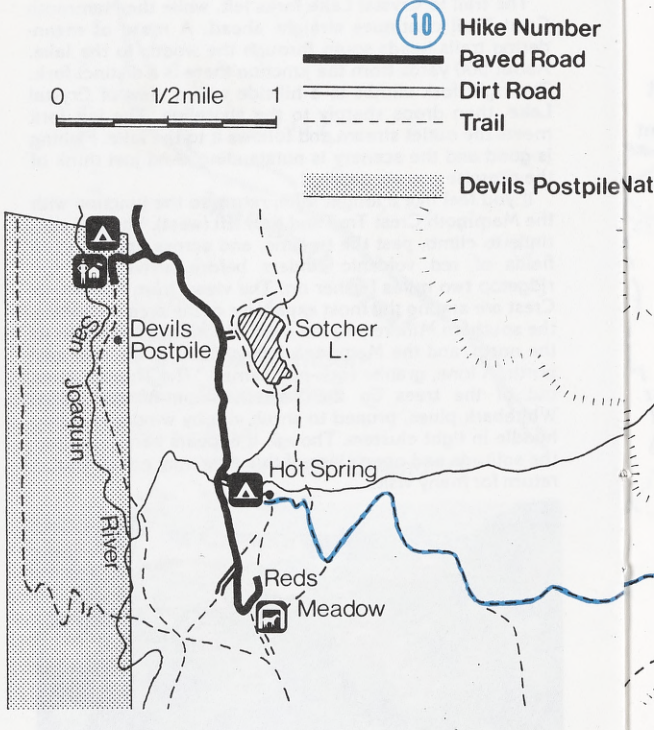
If you feel like a longer hike, return to the junction with the Mammoth Crest Trail and turn left (west). You will continue to climb, past the treeline, and across open, barren fields of red volcanic cinders before arriving at the ridgetop two miles further on. The views from Mammoth Crest are among the most expansive of the area, including the southern Minarets to the west, Mammoth Mountain to the north, and the Mammoth Lakes Basin to the east and north. A lone, granite rock-pile named "The Thumb" rises out of the trees on the western slope of the ridge. Whitebark pines, pruned to shrub size by wind and snow, huddle in tight clusters. Though it appears barren at first, the solitude and open skies of this area may entice you to return for many visits.

10 MAMMOTH PASS TRAIL TO McLEOD LAKE AND REDS MEADOW

The Mammoth Pass Trail provides an easy walk to a forest-ringed lake, or a moderate one-way hike to Reds Meadow when the shuttle buses are running. Some people enjoy hiking to the Devils Postpile before the road opens in spring. This provides a strenuous, often snowy, 12-mile round trip.

LENGTH: ½ mi. (McLeod Lake); 4 mi. (Reds Meadow); 6 mi. (Devils Postpile)
ELEVATION: 8,950' to 9,290' (350' climb to Mammoth Pass and McLeod Lake) to 7,600' (1,700' drop to Reds Meadow)
BEST SEASON: June through October
REMARKS: A shuttle bus will return you to the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area parking lot from late June through early September. Carry a map and compass; the trail is faint in places and views of landmarks are obscured by trees.

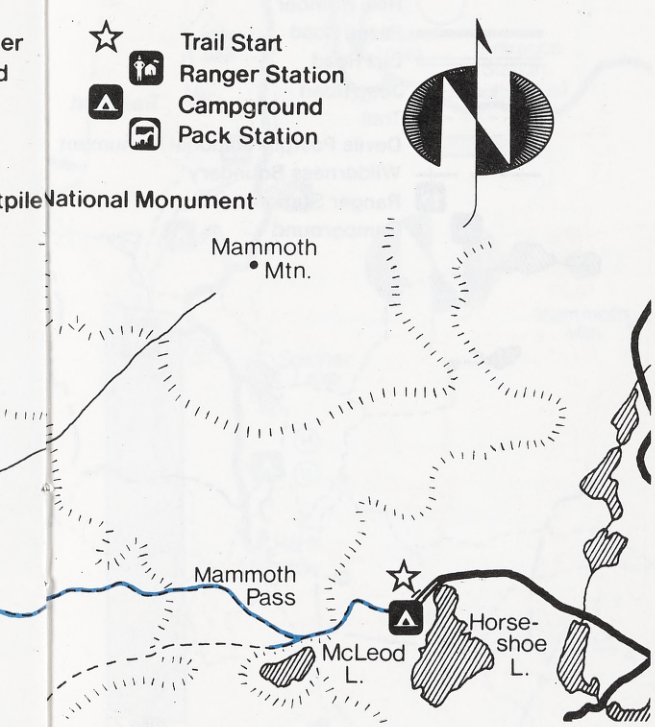
The trail begins after the end of the pavement and before the group campground at Horseshoe Lake. The trail heads uphill through deep pumice and lodgepole pines. After one-half mile, the trail forks; the left fork takes you south to McLeod Lake, the right fork continues to Reds



Meadow. A side trip to deep blue McLeod Lake offers good fishing and picnicking. No swimming is permitted because it is a domestic water source.

Mammoth Pass itself is broad and densely forested, disappointing those who expect a pass to be a place with a view. This pass is interesting, however, for its impact on the climate. This gap in the mountains is the lowest pass in the central Sierra Nevada. Moisture-laden clouds rise gently as they move east from the San Joaquin Valley. They eventually dump their snow load on Mammoth Mountain, making it grand country for skiers. Mammoth Pass is also the dividing line between the eastern and western watershed of the Sierra. The water running west goes to the Central Valley and San Francisco Bay. Waters flowing east join the Owens River and the Los Angeles Aqueduct, ending up in the metropolitan south.

The trail descends from the pass gradually at first. About two miles below the summit, the route passes a junction with the old route of the John Muir Trail and bears north as it switchbacks into Reds Meadow. Many giant pines, firs and hemlocks make this a special place for hikers who enjoy deep forests. The trail exits at Reds Meadow campground. An alternate spur trail ends at Reds Meadow pack station. The summer shuttle bus service (see page 26) will take you to points of interest within the valley, and return you to Mammoth Mountain Ski Area on Minaret Road. It is eight miles from the ski area parking lot back to Horseshoe Lake.



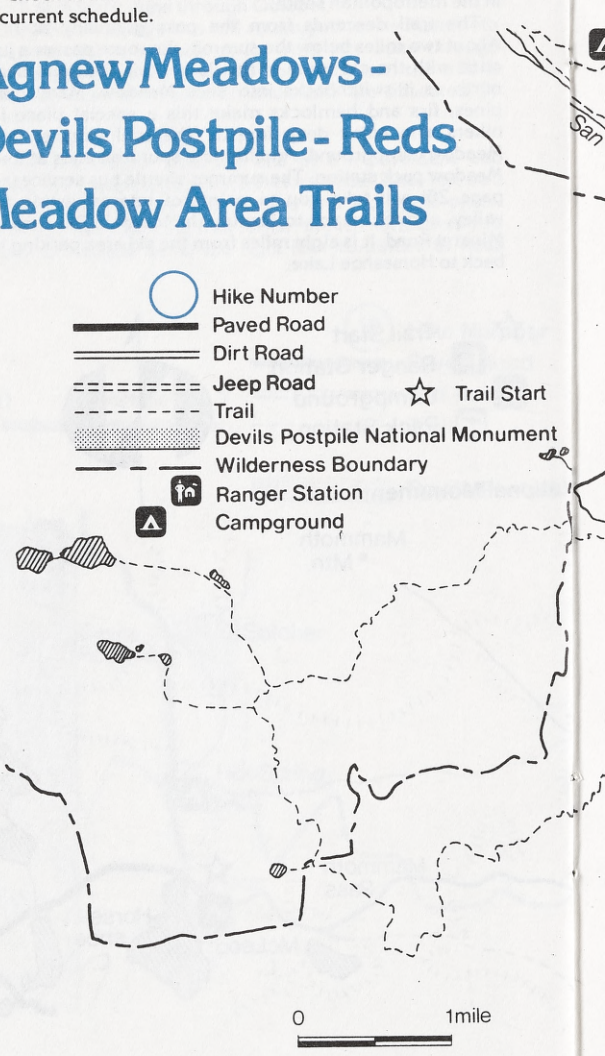
THE SHUTTLE BUS

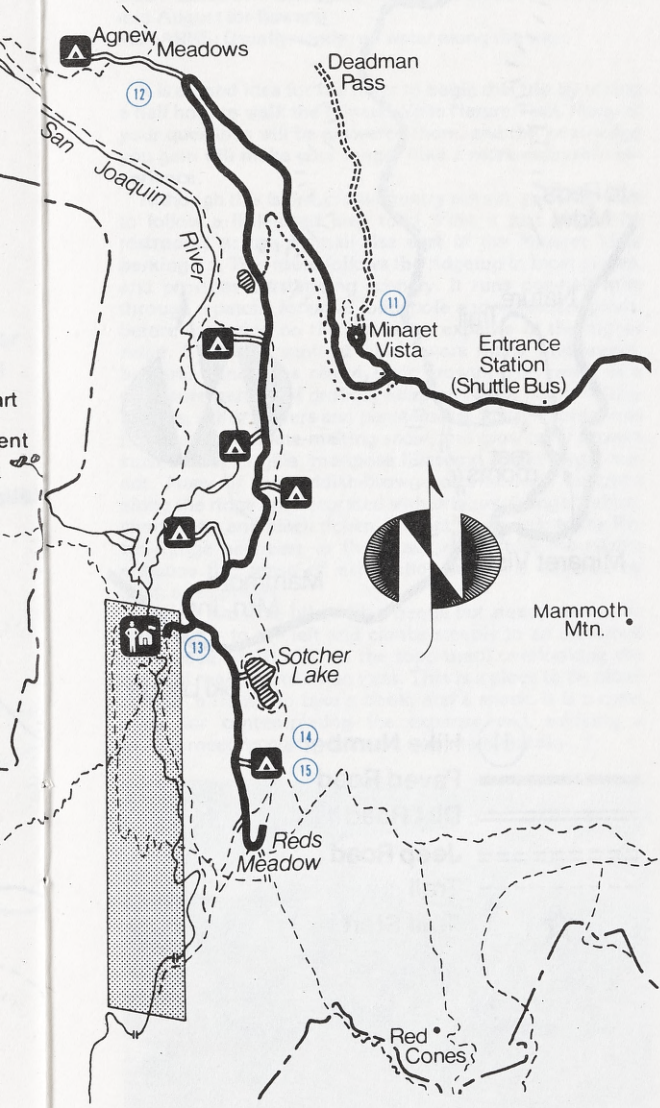
During the summer months, hikers can arrange a variety of one-way trips with the aid of a shuttle bus that serves the valley between Agnew Meadows and Reds Meadow. Here is your chance to explore new country without having to retrace your steps. Hikes #12-#15 on the following pages connect into the shuttle bus route. There are other loops that the adventuresome hiker can create by using some imagination and a map.

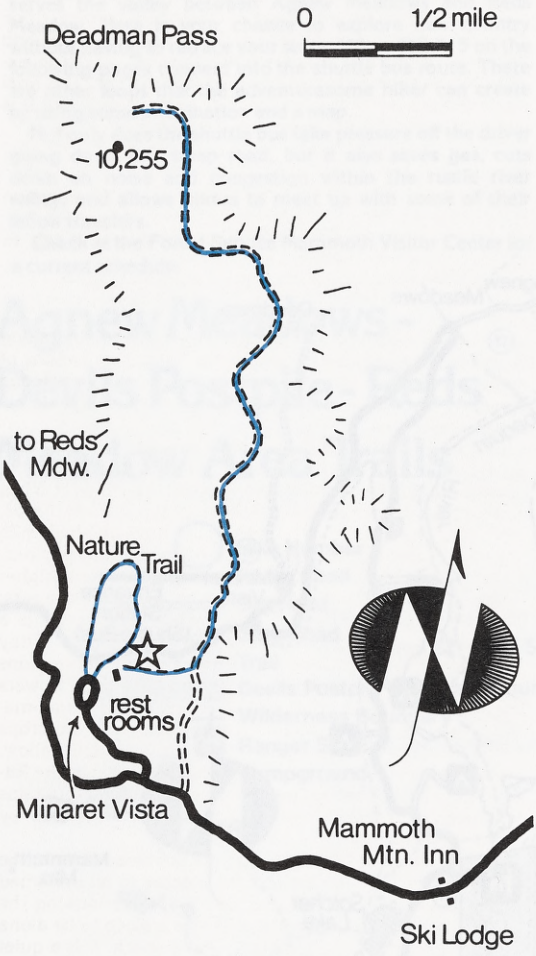
Not only does the shuttle bus take pressure off the driver going down this steep road, but it also saves gas, cuts down on noise and congestion within the rustic river valley, and allows hikers to meet up with some of their fellow travelers.

Check at the Forest Service Mammoth Visitor Center for a current schedule.

Agnew Meadows - Devils Postpile - Reds Meadow Area Trails




Agnew Meadows
12
Deadman Pass
San Joaquin River
11
Minaret Vista
Entrance Station (Shuttle Bus)
Mammoth Mtn.
13
Sotcher Lake
14
15
Reds Meadow
Red Cones



(11) Hike Number
Paved Road
Dirt Road
Jeep Road
Trail
Trail Start

11 SAN JOAQUIN RIDGE—MINARET VISTA TO DEADMAN PASS

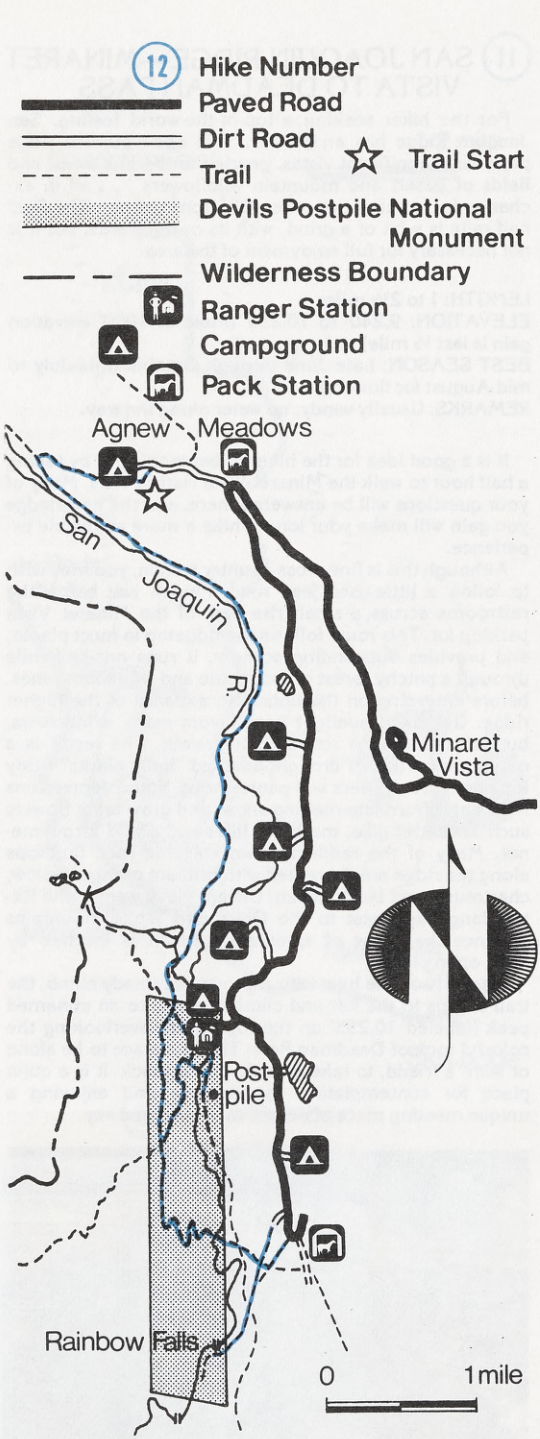
For the hiker seeking a top-of-the-world feeling, San Joaquin Ridge has an answer. This open pumice ridge provides magnificent vistas, gnarled timberline trees, and fields of desert and mountain wildflowers . . . all in exchange for an easy two mile walk from the car. The final half mile is a bit of a grind, with its own rewards, but it is not necessary for full enjoyment of the area.

LENGTH: 1 to 2½ miles
ELEVATION: 9,240' to 10,255' (most of 1000' elevation gain is last ½ mile)
BEST SEASON: Late June through October (mid-July to mid-August for flowers)
REMARKS: Usually windy; no water along the way.

It is a good idea for the hiker to begin this trip by taking a half hour to walk the Minaret Vista Nature Trail. Many of your questions will be answered there, and the knowledge you gain will make your longer hike a more enjoyable experience.

Although this is fine cross-country terrain, you may wish to follow a little-used jeep road. Find it just below the restrooms across a small rise east of the Minaret Vista parking lot. This route follows the ridgetop in most places, and provides outstanding scenery. It runs one-half mile through a patchy forest of lodgepole and whitebark pines, before emerging on the unbroken expanse of the higher ridge. Unlimited sunlight here favors many wildflowers, but arid conditions retard their growth. The result is a miniature garden of drought-adapted "belly plants"—tiny lupines, sulfur flowers and penstemons. Some depressions hold water from late-melting snow, and grow taller flowers such as scarlet gilia, mariposa lilies and a wild forget-me-not. Many of the reddish-brown volcanic rock outcrops along the ridge are decorated with brilliant orange, yellow, chartreuse, and black lichen. Distant views west to the Ritter Range and east to the Glass and White Mountains enhance the sense of exhiliration which is inspired by high, open places.

After a two mile hike with a gentle but steady climb, the trail swings to the left and climbs steeply to an unnamed peak (labeled 10,255' on the topo map) overlooking the colorful rock of Deadman Pass. This is a place to be alone or with a friend, to take a book, and a snack. It is a quiet place for contemplating the expanse and enjoying a unique meeting place of desert, mountain and sky.


12 Hike Number
Paved Road
Dirt Road
Trail
Trail Start
Devils Postpile National Monument
Wilderness Boundary
Ranger Station
Campground
Pack Station
Agnew Meadows
San Joaquin R.
Minaret Vista
Post-pile
Rainbow Falls
0
1 mile

12 PACIFIC CREST TRAIL: AGNEW MEADOWS TO REDS MEADOW

A variety of forest and riverside scenery awaits anyone who chooses this trip for a day of exploration. It is an excellent hike, providing cool shade, exercise (without a lot of ups and downs), and the chance to see some local points of interest. It is also an opportunity to hike on the Pacific Crest Trail. The entire trail is 2,500 miles long and runs from Mexico to the Canadian border.

LENGTH: 3 mi. (Soda Springs); 7 mi. (Devils Postpile); 9 mi. (Reds Meadow); 10 mi. (Rainbow Falls)
ELEVATION: 8,300' to 7,400' (gradual 900' descent)
BEST SEASON: July through October
REMARKS: In midsummer, a shuttle bus service will serve all entry and exit points mentioned in this description, providing easy return transportation to your car.

The Pacific Crest Trail leaves the Agnew Meadows trailhead parking lot and follows the Shadow Lake Trail. It branches to the left after one-half mile and goes south. The path descends along a rocky hillside above the San Joaquin River before it enters the woods. The majority of this trip is shaded by a forest of lodgepole and western white pine and a sprinkling of fir. It also follows the general route of the river. However, the trail itself plays hide and seek with the water, climbing above, dropping for a look and a drink, then winding away through the trees, only to bring you back for another distant view from high above. There are occasional fishing and wading places.

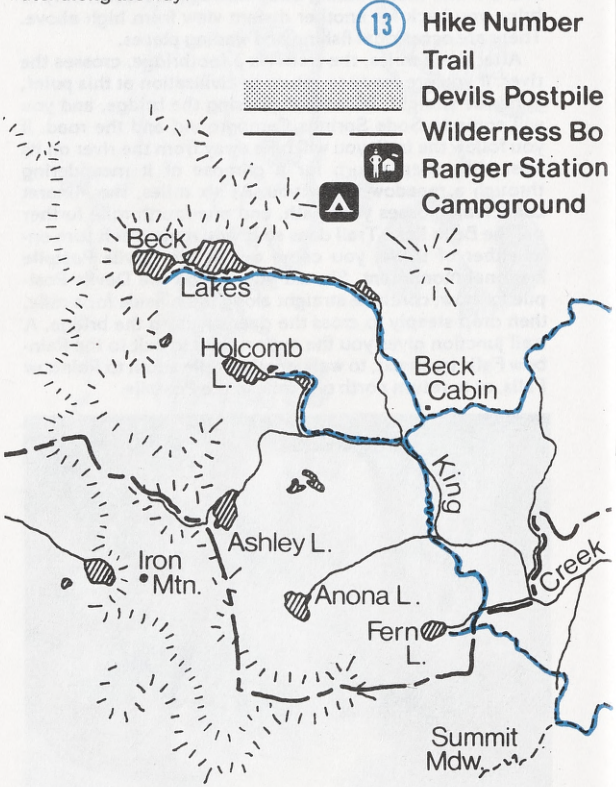
After three miles, the trail, via a footbridge, crosses the river. If you are ready to return to civilization at this point, continue straight, instead of crossing the bridge, and you will come to Soda Springs Campground and the road. If you follow the trail, you will hike away from the river on its west side, then return for a glimpse of it meandering through a meadow below you. At six miles, the Minaret Lake Trail crosses your path, and one-fourth mile further on, the Beck Lake Trail does so. If you make a left turn onto either of these, you come out at the Devils Postpile National Monument. Should you forego the Devils Postpile for now, continue straight along the hillside for a mile, then drop steeply to cross the river by using the bridge. A trail junction gives you the opportunity to exit to the Rainbow Falls trailhead, to walk another mile south to Rainbow Falls, or to return north one mile to the Postpile.

13 FERN LAKE-KING CREEK LOOP

This 14-mile loop is a long day trip with varied attractions for the ambitious hiker, or, it can be shortened into a moderate 12-mile trek by retracing the trail from Fern Lake instead of completing the loop. It explores the little-known and lightly-traveled southern end of the Minarets Wilderness area. It is a good place to "get away from it all."

LENGTH: 6 mi. (Fern Lake); 14 mi. to hike the loop; 16 to 20 mi. if side trips are added.
ELEVATION: 7,400' to 8,800' (1,400' climb to Fern Lake) to 9,600' (2,200' climb to Ashley, Holcomb or Beck Lakes).
BEST SEASON: July and August (very dry in fall)
REMARKS: Wilderness permit required, but quotas apply only to overnight trips.

This trail begins at Devils Postpile National Monument. Walk south from the parking lot and west to cross the San Joaquin River via a footbridge. Follow the John Muir Trail a few yards, then turn south onto the King Creek Trail. It is a one and one-half mile walk through the trees to King Creek, where a good log crossing is found about 100 yards downstream from the ford on the main trail. In two and one-half miles, the route climbs 1,250 feet, crossing open slopes with magnificent views east to Mammoth Mountain and south to Silver Divide. Manzanita and huckleberry oak thrive under these hot, dry, sunny conditions. There is no water along the way.

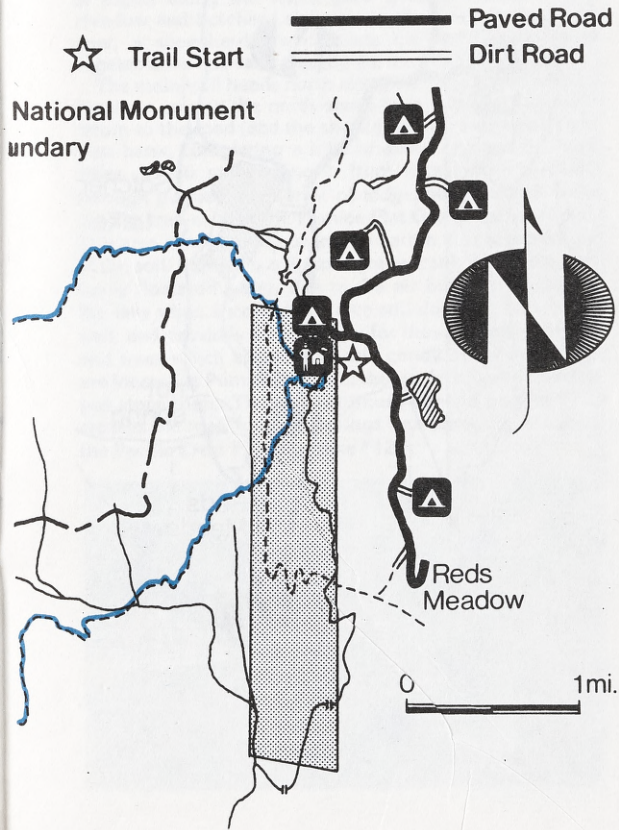


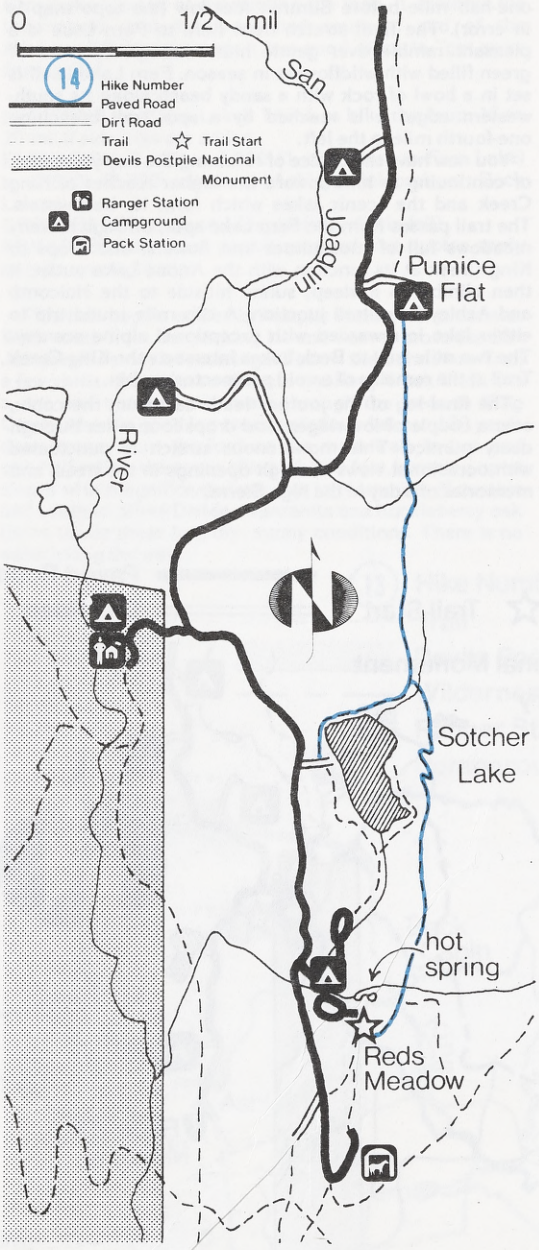
Eventually, the trail retreats into the shade of mountain hemlock, with openings offering views of the unnamed peaks above Beck and Holcomb Lakes.

The trail to Fern and Beck Lakes branches north about one-half mile before Summit Meadow (the topo map is in error). The final stretch from here to Fern Lake is a pleasant ramble over gentle hills, through enclaves of green filled with wildflowers in season. Fern Lake itself is set in a bowl of rock with a sandy beach along its southwestern edge. It is reached by a spur trail branching one-fourth mile to the left.

You now have the choice of returning the way you came, or continuing to hike toward the higher reaches of King Creek and the scenic lakes which form its headwaters. The trail passes from the Fern Lake spur, through marshy meadows full of mosquitoes and flowers, and drops to King Creek at its junction with the Anona Lake outlet. It then climbs up a steep, sunny hillside to the Holcomb and Ashley Lake trail junction. A two mile round trip to either lake is rewarded with exceptional alpine scenery. The two mile trail to Beck Lakes intersects the King Creek Trail at the remains of an old prospector's cabin.

The final leg of the journey leads east from the cabin, over a couple of low ridges, and drops four miles through dusty pumice. This monotonous stretch is punctuated with occasional views through openings in the trees, and memories of a day in the high Sierra.




0
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14
Hike Number
Paved Road
Dirt Road
Trail
Trail Start
Devils Postpile National Monument
Ranger Station
Campground
Pack Station
San
Joaquin
River
Pumice Flat
Sotcher Lake
hot spring
Reds Meadow

14 REDS MEADOW TO PUMICE FLAT via SOTCHER LAKE

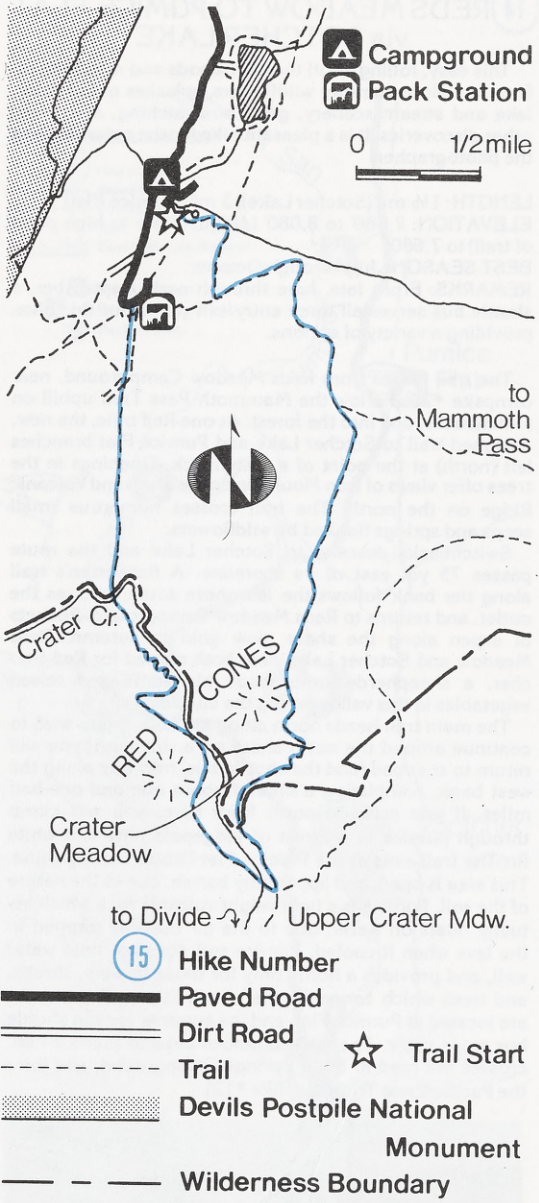
This easy, rolling stroll through woods and meadows offers marvelous summer wildflowers, splashes of fall color, lake and stream scenery, good birdwatching, and many other discoveries. It is a pleasant hike for the naturalist and the photographer.

LENGTH: 1½ mi. (Sotcher Lake); 3 mi. (Pumice Flat)
ELEVATION: 7,680' to 8,080' (400 ft. climb to high point of trail) to 7,680'
BEST SEASON: July through October
REMARKS: From late June through early September, a shuttle bus serves all three entry/exit points for this hike, providing a variety of options.

The trail leaves from Reds Meadow Campground, near campsite #25. Follow the Mammoth Pass Trail uphill on switchbacks, and into the forest. At one-half mile, the new, unsigned trail to Sotcher Lake and Pumice Flat branches left (north) at the point of a switchback. Openings in the trees offer views of Iron Mountain on the south and Volcanic Ridge on the north. The trail crosses numerous small seeps and springs flanked by wildflowers.

Switchbacks descend to Sotcher Lake and the route passes 75 yd. east of its shoreline. A fisherman's trail along the bank follows the lakeshore south, crosses the outlet, and returns to Reds Meadow Campground. Pockets of aspen along the shore glow gold in autumn. Reds Meadow and Sotcher Lake were both named for Red Sotcher, a sheepherder who made his home and raised vegetables in this valley during the late 1800's.

The main trail heads north along the lake. If you wish to continue around the north shore on a side path, you will return to the road (and the shuttle bus) mid-way along the west bank, completing a hike of about one and one-half miles. If you proceed north from here, you will climb through pumice in a forest of lodgepole pine and white fir. The trail exits at the Pumice Flat Group Campground. This area is open, and apparently barren, due to the nature of the soil. Pumice is a lightweight volcanic rock which actually floats on water, due to the air bubbles trapped in the lava when it cooled. Pumice soil does not hold water well, and provides a home only for those flowers, shrubs, and trees which can survive arid conditions. Pay phones are located at Pumice Flat, and the summer season shuttle bus stops there. The trail continues beyond Pumice Flat, crosses the road to Soda Springs Campground, and joins the Pacific Crest Trail (see Hike #12).


Campground
Pack Station
0
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to
Mammoth
Pass
Crater Cr.
CONES
RED
Crater
Meadow
to Divide
Upper Crater Mdw.
15
Hike Number
Paved Road
Dirt Road
Trail
Trail Start
Devils Postpile National
Monument
Wilderness Boundary

15 RED CONES AND UPPER CRATER MEADOWS

Red Cones country is uncrowded and does not hold the snow long in spring. It provides shady hiking with views and wildflowers as well as offering good exercise without being a grind. Take the hike when you feel like relaxed exploring, fresh air and being alone on the trail.

LENGTH: 3½ mi. (Upper Crater Mdw.); 4½ mi. (Deer Cr./Crater Cr. divide)
ELEVATION: 7,600' to 8,800' (1,200' climb to Upper Crater Mdw.): to 9,120' (1,520' climb to the divide)
BEST SEASON: Late June through October
REMARKS: Some of the trails are more recent than the topo map. The maze of trails in this area can be confusing. Signing is fairly good. A Wilderness permit is required for hiking beyond the Red Cones.

The trail begins at Reds Meadow campground, site #25. Follow the Mammoth Pass Trail southwest as it switchbacks steeply uphill through a dense forest of Red Fir. There are occasional views west toward Iron Mountain and the Ritter Range.

The route levels out after passing the turnoff to Mammoth Pass. Keep a watch to your right for a glimpse of the first Red Cone. A signed path climbs to the summit of the cone, providing magnificent views of the surrounding area. These small, pointed hills are composed of reddish-brown lava cinders which were tossed out of the now inactive vent at the center peak of each cone.

The main trail continues south, past Crater Meadows stream crossing, to the wide-open, grassy expanse of Upper Crater Meadows. If mosquitoes permit, this is a place to spend time lunching and sunning. A side trip continues one mile further south to vistas from the Crater Creek/Deer Creek divide and returns.

To complete the loop, hike north from Upper Crater Meadows a few feet and follow the Pacific Crest Trail as it branches off to the northwest. The route parallels the sparkling clear waters of Crater Creek and crosses many of its tributaries. It drops through the forest on a series of easy switchbacks, then ambles past a series of springs, small streams and wet meadows. Fertile, water-rich soils boast a multitude of summer woodland flowers. The trail ends at Reds Meadow Resort where you will find a pack station, cafe, store, pay phone, and shuttle bus stop.

RAMBLING FURTHER AFIELD

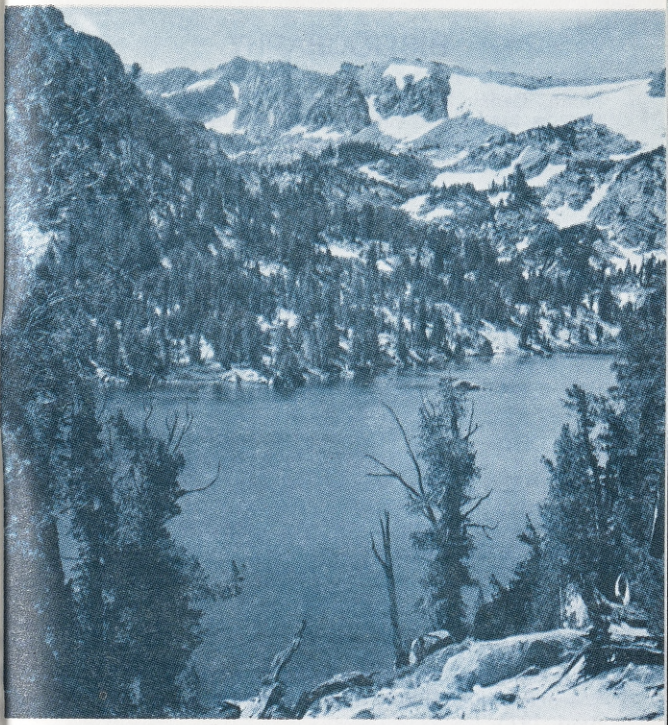
The trails in this booklet are only a beginning. As you get to know and enjoy the Mammoth backcountry and study the topographic maps, you will discover that there are many more hikes for the fresh air enthusiast who wants to explore.

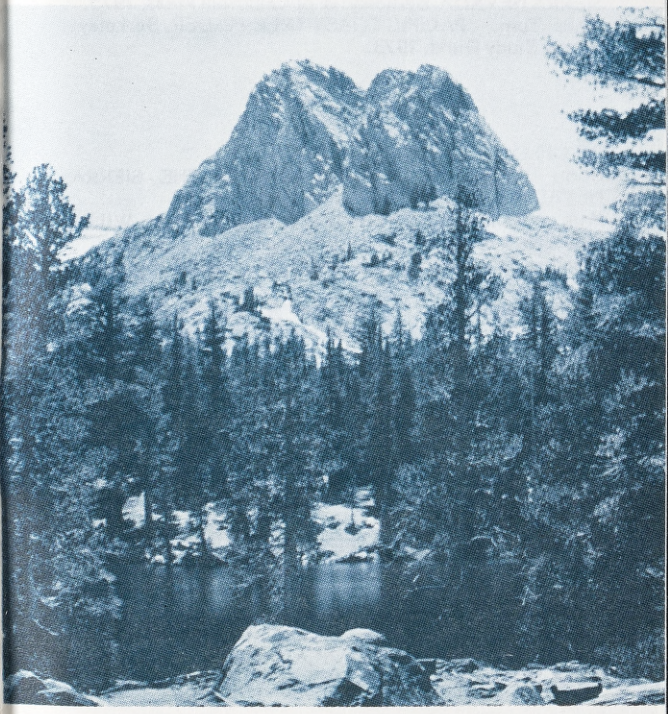
And don't be afraid to get out and poke around. As you learn more about your ability to exist on nature's terms, away from civilization, you will find more exciting and scenic places to explore. The Forest Service is currently emphasizing dispersed recreation, in contrast with concentration of use in a few popular places. We hope to see more people enjoying the fascination and peace available to them on National Forest land. We encourage you to look around, venture forth, and find spots that appeal to you. Follow a dirt road until your car complains, then get out and continue on foot. The woods and sagebrush hills around Mammoth are open and excellent for cross-country travel. See what you can find.

But remember, always go prepared. Carry the essentials for survival should you become injured or lost. Carry a map and compass and keep track of your route so you can retrace your steps.

As you tramp the trails, or amble cross-country, remember that the land, the forest and the trees all have a purpose in the natural cycle. Respect all living things in the forest because they have a special place in the chain of life. Take only pictures and leave only footprints so that the people behind you can also enjoy the beauty and freshness of the forest without finding signs of people.

Some of the joys of outdoor travel and exploration are the experiences of charting one's way, testing one's skills, and finding one's choice bit of scenery or "special place". Every forest visitor is entitled to these experiences so we ask that you keep minimum impact as your goal. We hope you have many enjoyable adventures exploring the Mammoth Ranger District on the Inyo National Forest.





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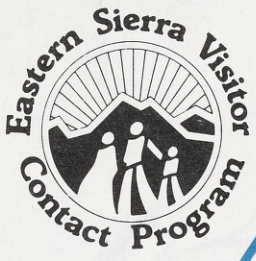

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